

## Career Development and the Classroom: Achievement, Relevance, and Student Engagement



Career academies, career majors, career pathways, career exploration, career planning – these are some of the ways in which academic achievement is fostered by a career-related context that is realistic, meaningful, and relevant to students. Emphatically, this is not another task for overburdened teachers; a career development context enables learners to engage and commit to learning and reach the highest standards of achievement.

Throughout the nation, career professionals are making high quality career information and resources available to educators and the public through America's Career Resource Network (ACRN). This includes the recently revised **National Career Development Guidelines**, which helps educators, career development professionals and community leaders develop high-quality career development programs for youth and adults nationwide. ACRN makes it easy for educators to connect with career development resources in their respective states.

Too often, career development is separate from academics. This separation is to the detriment of both. Placing academics in a career context provides students with an answer to the question, **"Why is this subject important?"** Providing an academic context to career exploration enables students to think about careers in the light of their academic experiences, their academic strengths, and their academic interests. Many states have even linked academic standards to related career development competencies.

In schools that connect career development to the classroom, students can experience internships that apply classroom knowledge. Students can explore work environments that use the knowledge provided in the classroom. Students can engage in job shadowing that reveals the occupational context and puts a human face on occupations that interest them. Within the classroom, students can use computerized career information systems to explore occupations that relate to the subject matter of the classroom. Through these and many other career-related experiences, students can test and refine their career interests and become more career mature in the process.

**Connecting academics with careers enlivens the classroom and places academics within a practical context.**

A central goal of the career development process is to facilitate an informed and considered career decision, which is characterized by higher levels of educational attainment, higher income, better mental and physical health, and greater job satisfaction. Likewise, informed and considered career decisions are associated with lower levels of unemployment, work-related illnesses, job stress, and employment insecurity.

Teachers can connect their classroom to the career world by infusing career activities, incorporating representatives of business and industry to explain how the subject matter relates to their work, by providing learning exercises adapted from real-world applications, and through work-based learning experiences. Across the academic spectrum, there are opportunities for relating career development to the content of the classroom.

**Through their career development experiences, students gain an appreciation of the value of education and the *real* positive consequences that derive from educational achievement.**

Current estimates are that as many as 14 million workers need career counseling annually, and that one in six workers will change jobs in any given year. The work world that students will experience will demand new skills in career self management. Students must prepare to respond effectively to a labor market characterized by volatility, global competition, contingent employment, and the need to continuously improve academic and work-related skills. The kinds of career self-management skills that students will need are developed through intentional career exploration, experiential learning, and reflection—in short, through career development experiences. Without these vital experiences, students will have little foundation for managing their work lives.

The academic classroom can facilitate career development, and career development experiences can energize and motivate learners. The high quality career information products developed through America's Career Resource Network are essential tools for supporting career development in the classroom, in counseling, and in many services provided by employment agencies, rehabilitation services, welfare to work programs, libraries, and other organizations.

#### **Additional Resources:**

- To identify ACRN resources in your state, go to [www.acrnetwork.org/network.htm](http://www.acrnetwork.org/network.htm)
- For more on making informed and considered career decisions, go to [www.acrna.net/publications/iccd-sub1.pdf](http://www.acrna.net/publications/iccd-sub1.pdf)
- For more information on teacher activities, go to <http://www.acrnetwork.org/teachers.aspx>
- For more information on using the National Career Development Guidelines, go to <http://www.acrnetwork.org/ncdg.htm>

